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## WHAT IS REAL PLEASURE?

IN a previous paper we expressed the view that the historic hedonistic controversy is a hopeless enterprise. It is hopeless, we said, because it assumes that pleasure is an ineffable something known only to the possessor and capable of being rated only by him: for certainly one who does not share a secret can not, in his unblissful ignorance, assume to pronounce upon its value. We insisted that these unshared secrets, like all unshared secrets, are meaningless. Hedonism, then, must give up its hidden treasures if it desires acknowledgment that they exist. The individual who shares a knowledge of his pleasures makes of this knowledge common property. The world is then able to pronounce him happy.

We insisted, further, that this shareability is essential to any assurance that the individual is experiencing pleasure, since without it there is no way of determining whether he has a vision of the truth or only an illusion. The mirage seems to us no less a false image because an entertaining one, and no less false if it simulates pleasure than if it simulates a landscape. This shareability of the knowledge of pleasure takes us at once into the field of the meaning of that knowledge and suggests objectivity. It was, in fact, for an acceptance of the objectivity of pleasure that we argued.

Our tentative definition of this objective pleasure was "the doing of a thing for its own sake, or more accurately, that which, all things being considered, should be done for its own sake." This "should be" was the conclusion of our previous paper and shall be the starting point of the present one.

The ethical tinge in the "should be" may be allowed to imply that men do not always choose that which is pleasurable and that they ought to correct false judgments. These judgments are often false because those judging rate falsely the evidence: the day is enjoyed for its own sake, as is right, but without at the same time enjoying it as part of the year, which is wrong. We do not refer to any false arithmetic, after the manner of certain naïve hedonists, in computing a simple sum of subtraction and addition, but to the fact that human life is a totality not composed of arithmetical units, and to the fact that the individual may select the wrong totality. The ill-spent day deflects the realization of a life programme in one direction, the well-spent day deflects it in another; thus there are totalities of life which do not lend themselves to the integer analysis.

Our philosophy of pleasure must take account of the fact that life is not made up of discrete entities, but is a continuum of purposes whose fulfilment is both ever present and ever incomplete. No pleas-

ure has an unqualified value, therefore, but a value which can be determined only when the life-process is known. When this is known, or more adequately known, the experience in the past adjudged a pleasure must, perforce, be readjudged in the light of this larger knowledge as less of a pleasure, or as no pleasure at all. It may have been merely a light-hearted way of inflicting pain upon oneself.

This view will seem monstrous to those who insist that pleasure is what it is at the time it is and can not be annihilated by a later attempt to prove that it happened at the wrong time, or was accepted in the wrong way, with painful and not pleasurable results. I hear some one inquiring, derisively, if a house was not a house though now it has collapsed in a heap of ruins upon the head of its owner. If the invented objector will vary the problem so as to bring it within the realm of human purposes and make it in some wise analogous to the problem of pleasure, we may accept the instance. Suppose we classify it, for example, as a house fit to live in or as a house that adds happiness to the owner. Then, indeed, I am ready to say that it was no such house; subsequent events have shown the falsity of the earlier estimation. The house was complete but not the human life to whose purpose it had reference, and so the meaning of that house, so far as this meaning concerns the owner, could not be determined until the purposes of said owner had been revealed.

In a similar category we would place the experience called pleasure. Pleasure is nothing if not an experience, and the experience called pleasure is no less liable than is a house to be called pleasurable when actually it is painful.

The greatest pleasure is the realization of life purposes. To posit this is not wholly dogmatic. Any purpose, any pleasure suggests a larger system of which it is a part, and all parts point to the whole. Beyond that we can not go and less than that we can not justify. In any discussion, however, some things must be posited, and as we can not prove this matter so briefly let us posit as the greatest pleasure the realization of the life purposes.

Can we know such a pleasure? I think it must be admitted that we can know it. We can no more experience that knowledge in a contracted momentary experience than we can in a moment hear or appreciate an opera, a play, or a book. One need not argue that, because there is an experience of successive impressions there is therefore no experience of the opera, the play, or the book.

We have not contended that to have pleasure we must be aware of it. On the contrary, we would insist that the experience of pleasure is, as a matter of fact, to a large extent independent of the consciousness of that pleasure. If we "know" it too insistently it

changes countenance, much as an "inside" becomes an "outside" as soon as we go looking for it. This is philosophic tradition among the hedonists, but they balk at the converse, namely, that we think we are experiencing pleasure when, as a matter of fact, we are not.

Briefly, then, the pleasure which is truly and not falsely pleasure, reality and not illusion, is that pleasure which is part of the larger pleasure, namely, the realization of our purposes. When we know what those purposes are we shall know a little better what pleasure is. Even then, of course, we may be often led astray as one following a will-o'-the-wisp or a false gleam. The visual illusion of the mirage does not disappear with knowledge of the adjacent or remote landscape, but such knowledge helps us to recognize the experience as an illusion and, having recognized it as such, we are not much led astray, be it ever so perfect an illusion. We believe, therefore, that a better understanding of the geography of the life purposes will correct many a false view of what is pleasurable, and will enable us to tread the right path to the right oases, even though the mirage of pleasure tempts us to assume that we are already planted in their very midst.

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#### REVIEWS AND ABSTRACTS OF LITERATURE

*The Autonomic Functions and the Personality*: EDWARD J. KEMPF.  
Nervous and Mental Disease Monograph Series, No. 28.

This work is the result of experimental science upon psychology. Formerly the principles of psychology were the result of an individual's introspection; now it is as little allowable to deduce principles of human behavior from introspection alone as it is to deduce chemistry from the same sources.

This monograph might with some justice carry the sub-title "The Physiological Interpretation of Psycho-Analysis" for it clears up the Freudian Theories, makes them in part acceptable to the physiologist and the psychologist by removing their mystic and empiric character. To the scientist whose belief is possible only on a basis of fact proven beyond a reasonable doubt all that psycho-analysis connotes would still retain a trace of mysticism, largely because, as I suspect, the physiologist has not as yet made the necessary researches to either prove or disprove its theories.

Progress in psychology has come just as it has in other sciences. There have been long stretches of apparently arid periods when there suddenly appeared a theory apparently at all odds with prevalent belief, arousing the latter's active antagonism.